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**Aitkin County**

# Supercharging Kids' Nutrition: What to Know About Supplements for 6 Months to 5 Years

## Introduction

Proper nutrition during early childhood is critical for growth, development, and long-term health. Ideally, children receive all essential nutrients through a balanced diet consisting of whole foods. However, there are cases where supplements may be necessary to fill nutritional gaps. This article outlines evidence-based supplement recommendations for children aged 6 months to 5 years and highlights the best supplements on the market from a dietitian's perspective.

## Key Nutrients for Children 6 Months to 5 Years

### 1. Vitamin D

- **Why it's Important:** Vitamin D supports bone health by aiding calcium absorption. It also plays a role in immune function.
  - **Recommendation:** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends **400 IU/day** for infants (6 months-12 months) and **600 IU/day** for children 1-5 years old.
  - **Sources:** Sunlight, fortified milk, eggs, and fish. However, due to limited sun exposure in many regions, supplementation is often necessary.
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### 2. Iron

- **Why it's Important:** Iron supports cognitive development and helps prevent anemia.
  - **Recommendation:**
    - **Infants 6-12 months:** 11 mg/day
    - **Toddlers 1-3 years:** 7 mg/day
    - **Children 4-5 years:** 10 mg/day
  - **At-Risk Groups:** Breastfed infants (after 6 months), picky eaters, and children with limited iron-rich food intake.
  - **Sources:** Fortified cereals, lean meats, beans, lentils, and leafy greens.
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### 3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids (DHA/EPA)

- **Why it's Important:** Omega-3s support brain development, cognitive function, and eye health.

- **Recommendation:** While there is no established RDA for Omega-3s, children should aim to consume **100-150 mg DHA/EPA daily**.
  - **Sources:** Fatty fish (salmon, sardines), flaxseed, chia seeds, and fortified foods.
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#### 4. Calcium

- **Why it's Important:** Calcium is essential for building strong bones and teeth.
  - **Recommendation:**
    - **1-3 years:** 700 mg/day
    - **4-5 years:** 1,000 mg/day
  - **Sources:** Dairy products, fortified plant milks, tofu, and leafy greens.
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#### 5. Vitamin B12

- **Why it's Important:** Vitamin B12 supports nerve function and red blood cell production.
  - **At-Risk Groups:** Children on vegetarian or vegan diets.
  - **Sources:** Animal products, fortified plant milks, and cereals.
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#### 6. Multivitamins

- **When to Use:** If a child has significant dietary restrictions, a poor appetite, or is a very picky eater, a multivitamin can ensure they meet daily nutrient needs.
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## Top Supplements for Children: A Dietitian's Guide to Smart Choices

Choosing the right supplement for your child can feel overwhelming. Here's what to prioritize to ensure safety and effectiveness:

- **High Quality:** Choose brands with third-party testing (e.g., NSF, USP, or ConsumerLab).
- **Age-Appropriate Form:** Look for liquids, powders, or chewables that match your child's developmental stage.
- **Clean Ingredients:** Avoid artificial sweeteners, colors, preservatives, and excess sugar.

### 1. Best Vitamin D Supplements

Essential for bone development and immune health.

- Nordic Naturals Baby's Vitamin D3 – 400 IU per drop, non-GMO, easy for infants.
- Carlson Baby's Super Daily D3 – Pure formula with just coconut oil and vitamin D.
- Ddrops Baby Vitamin D3 – One drop per day with no taste and minimal ingredients.

### 2. Best Iron Supplements

Supports brain development and prevents iron deficiency anemia.

- **NovaFerrum Liquid Iron** – Sugar-free, gentle on the stomach, available in tasty grape.

- **Zarbee's Baby Iron Supplement** – Naturally sweetened with agave, 10 mg per dose.
- **Wellements Organic Iron Drops** – USDA organic, free of preservatives and common allergens.

### 3. Best Omega-3 (DHA) Supplements

Crucial for cognitive development and eye health.

- **Nordic Naturals Children's DHA Liquid** – Sustainably sourced, light strawberry flavor.
- **Carlson for Kids Omega-3** – Trusted purity, available in liquid or soft gels.
- **Barlean's Omega Pals for Kids** – Smoothie-like texture in kid-friendly flavors like citrus or lemonade.

### 4. Best Multivitamins for Kids

Fills in nutritional gaps for picky eaters or restrictive diets.

- **SmartyPants Toddler Formula Gummies** – Contains key nutrients including D3, B12, iodine, and Omega-3s.
- **MaryRuth Organics Liquid Multivitamin** – Organic, vegan-friendly, and ideal for sensitive systems.
- **Hiya Kids Daily Multivitamin** – Clean label chewables with no added sugar and a focus on essential nutrients.

### 5. Best Calcium Supplements

Supports bone growth, especially during rapid development phases.

- **ChildLife Liquid Calcium with Magnesium** – Combines calcium, magnesium, and D3 in a tasty liquid.
- **Bluebonnet Calcium Magnesium Zinc for Kids** – Animal-shaped chewables with bone-building minerals.
- **Renzo's Calcium with D3 Melty Tabs** – Great for kids who won't take gummies or liquids, free of sugar and dyes.

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## General Tips for Gummy Vitamins:

- **Sugar and Stickiness:** Gummy vitamins often contain added sugar or sticky ingredients to enhance taste. These can adhere to teeth and increase the risk of cavities if not properly cleaned from the teeth.
  - **Brushing Teeth:** After taking gummy vitamins, it's important to brush your child's teeth to remove any sugar or sticky residue. This will help prevent cavities and maintain good oral hygiene.
  - **Timing:** Try to give gummy vitamins with meals when possible, as this can help reduce the potential for sticky residue remaining on teeth after consumption.
  - **Water:** If brushing right away is not an option, offer your child water after taking the vitamins to help rinse off any sugar or residue.
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## Tips for Parents

1. **Consult a Pediatrician:** Always check with your child's healthcare provider before starting supplements.
  2. **Focus on Food First:** Encourage a balanced diet rich in whole foods.
  3. **Follow Dosage:** Always follow the recommended dosage, as excessive intake of certain vitamins (such as iron or vitamin D) can be harmful to children.
  4. **Make Supplements Fun:** Use liquids or chewables that are tasty and easy to administer.
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## Smart Supplementing Starts Here

While a balanced diet should be the primary source of nutrients for children aged 6 months to 5 years, supplements can play a supportive role when dietary intake is insufficient. Prioritize high-quality, tested supplements that meet your child's unique needs. As always, consult with a pediatrician or registered dietitian to ensure your child's growth and development are on track.